



Accelerating What Works: Full-Day Pre-K

When it comes to pre-k, some is good, and more is better. Full-day public prekindergarten programs are proving to be a birth-to-eight policy strategy that produces significant outcomes for children, providing a path to reading proficiency by the end of third grade.

In the coming year, more communities will have the opportunity to provide public preschool. The FY14 Consolidated Appropriations Act appropriated \$250 million for [a new competition](#) to build, develop and expand high-quality preschool programs, working with local communities and states across the country. The U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services have been collecting comments from across the nation to inform their work developing the competition requirements, priorities, and selection criteria. You can read those comments [here](#) and [here](#).

The Preschool Connection to Third Grade Reading

Reading proficiency at the end of third grade is the cumulative result of a child's experiences and learning during the birth-to-eight years. That's why In *A Governor's Guide to Early Literacy: Getting all Students Reading by Third Grade*, the National Governors Association advises that "States can increase the number of children who are proficient in reading by third grade by including three major and widely embraced results of educational research in their efforts:

- Differences in literacy and language development in early childhood can lead to achievement gaps as early as kindergarten;
- Reading proficiency requires a focus on interrelated skills and knowledge taught over time; and
- Parents, primary caregivers and teachers have the most influence on children's language and literacy development."

North Carolina Excels

Since 2001, North Carolina has provided full-day, public prekindergarten, now known as NC Pre-K, to more than 255,000 children. For the children it serves NC Pre-K is one of the best programs in the nation. It is one of only five to meet the National Institute for Early Education Research's (NIEER) [10 quality benchmarks](#).

NC Pre-K program providers are [required](#) to serve children for a minimum of 6.5 hours per day for 10 months (36 weeks) of instructional days per school calendar year. The definition of full-day varies by state and usually ranges between 6.5 and 8 hours. Working parents typically need a year-round program and additional hours each day. [Smart Start](#) local partnerships support working families by filling in these gaps.

In the [latest evaluation](#) of NC Pre-K released earlier this month, researchers found that children are progressing at an even greater rate during their participation in NC Pre-K than expected for normal developmental growth. Earlier research showed that at the end of third grade, children from low-income families who had attended pre-k had higher reading and math scores on the North Carolina end-of-grade (EOG) tests than similar children who had not attended the state's program.

What does the research say about full-day pre-k?

Children who attend full-day pre-k programs significantly outperform their peers who attend half-day programs. And both outperform those who did not attend pre-k. We've highlighted some of the research findings below.

[Is More Better? The Effects of Full-Day vs. Half-Day Preschool on Early School Achievement](#)

Using the gold standard of research – a randomized trial with a control group – a study by the National Institute for Early Education Research found the “added hours of preschool education were substantially effective at closing the achievement gap between urban children and their more advantaged peers.”

Researchers randomly assigned four-year-olds living in a low-income, urban district to half- or full-day programs. Both had teachers with college degrees, a low ratio of children to teachers, and used the same curriculum. By the end of their kindergarten year, children who had attended the full-day program improved significantly more on vocabulary and math scores. They continued to outperform the children in the control group through first grade.

[Does Prekindergarten Experience Influence Children's Subsequent Educational Development?](#)

A Syracuse University study found that 80 percent of children who had attended a full-day pre-k program in the Syracuse City School District entered kindergarten at the appropriate developmental level. The same could be said for 60 percent of the children that attended the half-day program, and less than half for those with no pre-k experience.

[How much is too much? The influence of preschool centers on children's social and cognitive development](#)

Published in the Economics of Education Review, this paper concludes, “While half day programs may be beneficial for children from higher-income families, full-day programs better serve children from lower-income families, allowing them to gain prereading and math skills without detriment to social behavior.”

[Evaluating Lasting Effects of Full-day Prekindergarten Program on School Readiness, Academic Performance, and Special Education Services](#)

A report from Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland shows that children who attended a full-day pre-kindergarten program did better on reading skills tests by the end of kindergarten than their counterparts who attended a half-day program.

Researchers examined outcomes for children attending a full-day Head Start program, half-day Head Start program or half-day county pre-k program. They found that students that had attended the full-day pre-k program were 44 percent more likely to meet the expected reading benchmark at the end of kindergarten than those in the half-day half-day Head Start program and, 63 percent more likely than those in the half-day county program.

Full-Day Preschool: A Recommended Birth-to-8 Strategy

Policy leaders have taken notice of the research. Many are recommending full-day prekindergarten as a critical birth-to-eight strategy.

[The U.S. Conference of Mayors](#)

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that The United States Conference of Mayors supports the following policy priorities:

Aim to provide access for all 3 and 4-year olds from families with incomes at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty line to a high-quality, full-day early childhood education;

[National Association of Elementary School Principles](#)

Expand funding for pre-kindergarten through third grade learning to ensure that all children—particularly the most at-risk children—have access to high-quality, full-day learning experiences.

[The First Eight Years \(Annie E. Case Foundation\)](#)

States should provide voluntary, full-day, high-quality and developmentally appropriate prekindergarten programs that serve all children, beginning with investments that target low-income 3- and 4-year-olds.

[Birth to Age Eight State Policy Framework](#)

Access to high-quality care and learning programs for infants and toddlers with educational, health, and development components; high-quality child care; voluntary, full-day preschool for all low income 3-and 4-year-olds; and full-day kindergarten.